

In Memoriam.

Albert Sidney Johnston.

BORN JUNE TWENTY-FIRST, 1861,

Died January Ninth, 1885.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Duke University Libraries

<http://archive.org/details/inmemoriamalbert00john>

RBR
E Pam
319
c.1

RICHMOND, VA., JANUARY 16TH 1885.

DEAR FRIENDS:

We trust that, as we have not the strength in our affliction to write, you will accept this as our notification to you of the death of our only son, ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON.

Dying in his twenty-fourth year, our son will leave no sign, except in the hearts of those who loved him and saw in him the promise of a noble manhood. We send you this brief memorial, not to perpetuate his early virtues, for which the great world has no thought, but to recall for a moment to your minds and hearts one much loved and early lost. Pardon us, if the pride and affection of bereaved parents sets too high a price on what was so precious to them.

ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON was the only son of William Preston Johnston and Rosa Duncan Johnston, and was the fourth in a family of six children. He was born on the twenty-first day of June, 1861, at his father's homestead, in the environs of Louisville, Kentucky; he received the name of his grandfather, who was then in California. His father had already espoused the cause of the South at the time of his birth, and when he was only two months old, his mother, following her husband's fortunes, abandoned her home and took her little family South, where they were refugees and wanderers for the four years of the sectional war. He was christened at St. Paul's Church, at Richmond, Va., one week before its capture, with President Jefferson Davis, General G. W. C. Lee, and Miss Care, as his sponsors.

After the close of the war, Colonel Johnston became a professor under General Robert E. Lee, in Washington and Lee University, at Lexington, Va. His home was at Clifton, a country place, one mile from Lexington, on the banks of the North (James) River. Here his children grew up, and here Albert received his early training and education. There are many who will recall with a friendly sigh this picturesque home, and the handsome boy, who was its joy.

Albert was at first taught at home, and afterwards attended the day school of the Rev. (General) William N. Pendleton, and his daughter, Mrs. Susan P. Lee.

The warmest affection existed between himself and this family, in which he was treated as a kinsman. He was one year at Washington and Lee University, when he determined to embrace a business life. He had always been a dutiful, but not an ardent student. He had pursued Latin, Mathematics, and the usual branches, but had had no opportunity for instruction in Zoology, which was the only science for which he evinced taste or interest. Books were always irksome to him, though his apprehension of ideas was quick and clear. The great book of Nature he studied after his own methods, and for its own sake, without a hope or ambition for any other reward than the knowledge itself. The desire to earn an independent livelihood turned his attention to a business career. He accepted an offer of employment from Colonel Henry McCormick, of Harrisburg, Penn., who had been his father's classmate at Yale College; so that, at seventeen years of age, he left home and kindred for an apprenticeship in the iron business. At first he was employed as a clerk at the furnace, and finally as book-keeper for Colonel McCormick's manifold transactions. He remained in these positions until his death, with the interval of one year spent in Louisiana and Virginia, in other duties. He was very faithful, exact, and industrious, and never neglected any duty. He gave entire satisfaction, and received steady promotion.

In Albert's early education, his parents aimed at moral and physical completeness rather than at mere intellectual superiority, and they believe the result was attained. He was a very beautiful boy, and grew to a noble and manly presence, with a strong resemblance to the grandfather for whom he was named, which resemblance extended likewise to mind and character. He was over six feet in height, with a powerful and active frame, and a physical organization, free from spot or blemish. His hair and eyes were light brown; his features regular and handsome; his teeth very strong, regular and white; his coloring fresh and fair. His bearing was commanding and dignified for one so young, and his manners had a natural sweetness and grace, in which cordiality and deference were blended. He was utterly devoid of affectation and arrogance, and young and old were attracted by his friendly ways. His conversation was a reflex of his mind, unambitious, but sensible and to the point.

Brought up under the shadow of the Blue Ridge, in the simple and hardy life of our Virginia boys, his nature was entirely wholesome and clean. It easily

resisted the greater vices, and readily threw off those foibles and errors into which the generous and social impulses of youth so easily entice us. Finding that smoking tobacco had grown upon him into an exacting habit, in his last year he limited himself to a very small indulgence in it, and he also absolutely refrained from every form of ardent spirits. In his last illness, when the physician ordered stimulants for him, he could not be induced to take them, except at his father's request. He would say, even in his delirium, "It is against my conscience."

Self control had been set before him as the law of his being, and he conformed to it with a resolution and purpose remarkable in these days. This was not so hard for him, as for many. He was by nature abstemious. When a mere lad he would leave a table spread with many dishes to break his fast on plain porridge and milk before a day of hard hunting. And though devoted to field sports and the severest exercises, he was very scrupulous as to personal neatness. Delicacy and strength were combined in his character, and he had a strong love for the beautiful. His room was decorated with chaste and simple beauty, so far as his poor means permitted

He was very fond of his dogs, his horse and his gun. These were freely allowed him in his youth, and it was a great privation to him that he could not enjoy them at Harrisburg. He was extremely fond of hunting, especially of driving the deer in the mountains, and had killed his deer before he was fifteen. He was one of a choice band of as noble huntsmen as ever followed hound. In his last illness, in the wild and wandering thoughts of fever, he fancied continually that he was treading the piny slopes of the Alleghanies and listening to the cry of his pack. In such a dream he said to his father mournfully, "I am not much of a business man, but I am a good huntsman." But he did not like to inflict suffering, and frequently said to his father, "It is hard to kill a deer, they have such pleading eyes."

He had a steady friendship and understanding with all dumb animals, but his dogs were his favorites. There was something very touching in his last act when he left his boyhood's home. His dogs had been given to his friends as parting gifts, but he wound his hunter's horn, as he was departing, and called them all around him for a last farewell.

He loved all Nature, especially in its wild beauty. But his chief pleasure was in birds, and this not in any ordinary sense. He knew more about them than anybody we ever saw. He did not learn about them in books, but from a delightful companionship. This began with the poultry yard, and with his chickens, in whose courage and beauty he took great pleasure. But he reared all manner of birds, and Clifton was a haunt for tame hawks, falcons and owls, which lived among the trees, not molesting their foster brothers of lowlier birth in the poultry yard. All the native birds he knew familiarly, and their nests, eggs, plumage and habits, with an accuracy which might have instructed a scientific ornithologist. His practical knowledge was so full in this field of observation that he might readily have attained note in it, if he had had any ambition about it. He knew birds well, because he loved them so much, and, though so keen a sportsman, rarely killed them. In his last illness he said to his father, "It is a pitiful thing to see a little bird die."

A business career was not his parents' plan of life for him, nor his own wish, though it was the choice of both. It was his and their hope, that after a few years of preparation he might find a home on a farm among the hills of Virginia, which he loved so well. This was their dream, which has been broken. It was thought the exact habits of business which he had acquired, would be the best guaranty of success in any career, and that the patient industry, self-reliance and dutifulness of his life in Harrisburg would be the fittest preparation for any future which might open to him. And so it has been. But it was a heavy burthen on one so young and full of ardor to change the free life of nature to which he had been used for the toil of the ledger and desk. He did his part manfully and without complaining. He said to his father, among his last words, "I have earned my living honestly—perfectly so; but it has been by pretty hard work."

His life in Harrisburg was a very quiet one. He received great kindness from the families of Colonel McCormick and Mr. David Watts, who was in the office with him.

Although the good people of Harrisburg extended to him many kindnesses and attentions, a certain natural reserve prevented him from sharing as fully in the social pleasures of the place as his friends desired. This had, however, gradually worn off, and in the last year of his life, he saw more of the social life

of the little capital. He became a favorite there, and in his last illness a genuine and generous interest was evinced by many kind attentions, for which his parents now offer this inadequate acknowledgment of their poor thanks.

Albert was taken sick early in November. His mother was very ill in Richmond, Va., and he was anxious to visit her, but his own malady prevented. At first he went to the house of his friend, Mr. David Watts, but when he found that he was apt to have a serious attack, he had himself removed, on the 21st of November, to the Harrisburg Hospital. He forbore to acquaint his family with the severity of his disease for fear of adding to his mother's distress. But as soon as they surmised it, his father and his sister, Mrs. Tucker, early in December, went to his bedside and remained with him till he died. They were assisted in nursing him by a kind friend, Mrs. F. B. Taliaferro, of Richmond, Va.

Soon after their arrival, the disease manifested itself as typhoid fever of a peculiarly malignant type. His illness was one long struggle, of eight weeks from its beginning, between a mortal malady and a constitution as nearly perfect as the human body permits, and entirely unimpaired. It was three weeks before the brain was affected at all, and even in the delirium of fever he preserved a lucidity which comprehended his surroundings, and recognized the physicians and friends who ministered to him, and obeyed their requests. His treatment by Dr. T. J. Dunott, his physician, and his assistant, Dr. F. Fithian, was kind, intelligent and skilful, and his nursing careful, vigilant and tender. His friends were constantly buoyed up by the hope of his mastering the disease. But where he gained by inches, he lost by relapses, attributable only to the virulence of the typhoid poison. His strength and vitality were remarkable, but at length blood poisoning ensued, and at last, on the 9th of January, 1885, at five minutes past one in the afternoon he passed into his eternal rest. After all his suffering he breathed his last in his father's arms as quietly as an infant falls asleep.

Except when under the influence of opiates, he had all along shown reasonableness in his fever; but when he came from under their drowsy spell, at the very last, though so feeble, his mind cleared. The presence of his sister and father had been the greatest comfort to him. Now he drew his sister down, wiped away her tears, and kissed her repeatedly. His last conscious act was to

put his arm around his father's neck, hold him close to him, and kiss him many times. Thus he passed away.

His body was taken to Louisville, Ky., in charge of his kind friends, Mr. Simon Cameron, Jr., and Mr. William Bailey, of Harrisburg, and his brother-in-law, George A. Robinson, of Louisville. Here it was met by loving kinsmen and friends of his youth. His body was carried to the house of Mr. R. A. Robinson, and treated with affectionate respect. On Sunday, January 11th, after a touching funeral service by Bishop Penick at St Andrew's Church, he was buried among his people, by his father's mother, in Cave Hill Cemetery. His remains repose in sight of his birth place.

Our boy was brought up, so far as our light permitted us, in the way of piety duty and honor. He was intended for a sturdy manhood. He was taught that he was here for others, and not for himself; that honorable labor was his appointed lot, and that he was to do the thing that was right. He learned these lessons well, and acted them out. He bore a great name and had a charge to keep it stainless. This he did. It was often remarked, how little he cared for applause, but no one ever knew him to do a mean or unbecoming thing. We never knew him to tell a lie, from babyhood even, and he took pains to be exact in his statements. He was very brave and resolute, as was evinced on several memorable occasions, but he was also remarkably peaceable. No one had fewer quarrels, and he never lost a friend, though he had many. Though his association was wide and easy, he had only a few very dear friends, and these were such as we would have chosen for him in all the world. He was gallant and deferential to ladies, and fond of their society, though he permitted himself no great indulgence in it. To his sisters he was a devoted brother. His intelligence was strong and clear; his judgment calm and tolerant; his life clean, virtuous, and temperate; his whole nature pure, manly and generous. To both parents, he was a dutiful and affectionate son; to his father, a companion and friend who can never be replaced.

The last letter he wrote was one to his mother, lamenting some follies of his youth, and promising that the self-restraint which had controlled his later action should be the rule of his life, and telling her that his love for her drew him nearer to her church.

He was such a young man as God loves, and when the Eternal Father claimed him, his earthly parents feel that he is in hands tenderer and more loving than their own. "We will go to him, but he will not return to us." "We will go down into the grave unto our son mourning." A light has gone out of our life here. But we rest assured that the All Merciful will restore to us our son, and that our prayers for his happiness have been answered by giving him the Eternal Life.

WM. PRESTON JOHNSTON,
ROSA DUNCAN JOHNSTON.



